

SOPAC NewsUpdate #041, 25 November 2005

1. Samoa hosts SOPAC Session again after 21 years

The 34th Session of the SOPAC Governing Council was hosted by the Government of Samoa, at the Kitano Tusitala Hotel in Apia, Samoa, from 24 to 30 September. The Government of Samoa last hosted a SOPAC Session in 1984. Honorable Faumuina Liuga, the Minister of Works, Transport and Infrastructure presided at the Official Opening on behalf of his Government. The 34th Session also celebrated the 21st birthday of the Science, Technology and Resources Network (STAR), which also held its inaugural session in Apia in 1984. Most notably the meeting received 'good' external review reports of the EU Project on Vulnerability Reduction hosted at the SOPAC, and of the SOPAC technical programmes (see item 2 below). Member country representatives and STAR scientists also bid farewell to outgoing Deputy Director, Russell Howorth, thanking him for dedicating a quarter of a century of his life to the SOPAC cause.

2. Programme evaluators impressed by diversity

The programme evaluation groups formed at the SOPAC 33rd Session in 2004, to critique the technical programme areas of SOPAC, and 'judge' the science practised by the Secretariat in implementing the SOPAC work programmes completed their first flight of the process this year in the few days prior to the SOPAC 34th Session. The evaluators were impressed with the quality, quantity and diversity of projects being undertaken to respond to member-country requests, but urged that some prioritisation guidelines may need to be developed to ensure staff were not overstretched, overcommitted and stressed out. They found a general disconnect between donors' and the Pacific's concept of time and urged greater understanding on the part of the donors. Problems highlighted include: aging equipment, lack of comprehensive data management given the amount of data acquired and available out there, and general in-house procedures that hinder rather than facilitate technical work programme implementation. The three groups of evaluators submitted succinct reports that well articulated the successes and the problem areas. These are part of the official record of the SOPAC 34th Session and will be published with the Proceedings volume early in the new year.¶

3. UNDP-ESCAP enthused about three-in-one meeting format

A regional consultation held with SOPAC member countries' energy contacts early this month to view current progress on a couple of UN-sponsored projects on poverty reduction and mainstreaming renewable energy training in the Pacific, was also used by UN agencies to glean for Pacific input into ESCAP's submission from the Asia-Pacific region into the Commission of Sustainable Development 14 (CSD14) scheduled for February 2006. The three-in-one meeting was pronounced a win-win format in that it saved time and money for the funding agency and member states in seeking endorsement and progressing UN projects that require Pacific endorsement to strengthen the case for funding. The meeting reviewed final drafts of project documents for the UNDP Regional Energy Programme for Poverty Reduction (REP-PoR) and the UNESCAP-CROP EWG Pacific Renewable Energy Training Initiative, and discussed various ways of highlighting Pacific issues at the CSD14. ESCAP officials were enthusiastic about repeating the format in the future for similar consultations.¶

4. Pacific Islands Fire Service Association established

Fire authorities from twelve island countries unanimously supported the formation of a Pacific Islands Fire Association (PIFSA) while attending an Australasian Fire Authorities Council (AFAC)/SOPAC planning meeting in Auckland from 5 to 7 October. Furthermore, subject to national governments' approvals, PIFSA could become an associate member of AFAC. An executive committee for PIFSA was endorsed with Isaac Silas, the Chief Fire Officer of Papua New Guinea taking the Presidency, and the delegates from the Cook Islands and Samoa accepting to act as Vice Presidents. The South Australian Metropolitan Fire Service offered to act as the Secretariat to the new association and assist with the development of its charter and operating protocols. The fire services agreed that such arrangement would create a forum to share ideas and work towards common standards of fire protection and community safety in the region. The journey to strengthening fire services in the Pacific will begin in Fiji in March 2006, where the Fiji National Fire Authority will host the executive committee. Next up is the formulation of a strategy that will spell out the priority areas. The first formal meeting of the association is expected to be in conjunction with the AFAC annual conference scheduled for August 2006, in Melbourne.¶

For more information on any item in this NewsUpdate please contact the SOPAC Director: director@sopac.org